

## The Oregonian

### Portland Bureau of Transportation Director Leah Treat talks culture, cars and rail projects in Honolulu (Q&A)

*By Andrew Theen*

A few of Portland's top city employees became mini-experts on Memphis, Indianapolis and Honolulu this year.

Why? Portland is one of four cities selected for the nonprofit Urban Land Institute's Daniel Rose Center for Public Leadership in Land Use fellowship program.

What exactly do these fellows do? The mayor of each participating city selects a focus area -- basically a project or neighborhood -- they want the fellows (experts in transportation, business, urban renewal, etc.) to study.

Mayor Charlie Hales picked the Central Eastside as Portland's area of interest.

They don't get a lot of time, but officials from each city spent a few days dug alongside colleagues from the others where they dig in and come up with recommendations on special projects.

Susan Anderson, Bureau of Planning & Sustainability director, visited Memphis. Patrick Quinton, Portland Development Commission executive director, got to know Indianapolis.

Leah Treat, Portland Bureau of Transportation director, returned from Honolulu recently. The ULI paid for the trip, but it wasn't all work.

Treat's husband has "deep family roots" on Oahu. The Treat family spent some vacation time on the islands, too. Treat's son, Wylder, is named after the "Wilder's of Waikiki." Treat said she was excited to expose her kids to the Hawaiian culture.

We caught up with Treat to talk about her trip. Treat's responses were sent via email, and some were edited for brevity.

Q: How did you swing this trip? Patrick Quinton got Indianapolis?

"Really sweet gig, right? It was my first time in Hawaii. The ULI challenge in Honolulu had a lot to do with transportation infrastructure. It doesn't seem immediately apparent as a transportation project because the focus was on the Neal S. Blaisdell Center, which is Oahu's concert arena, exhibition space and concert hall. But the Center is surrounded by six-lane, one-way roads, a dark and un-activated park, two large development sites, and it sits on the fringes of robust commercial and tourist corridors. For the Blaisdell Center to be successful, the public right of way needs to invite people into the District and its proper valuation can fuel the needed investments for the Center to continue to thrive."

Q: The ULI fellows visited Portland, and were quite impressed with how 'we' do things here. What was your impression of Honolulu?

"I was overwhelmed by Honolulu. One of the things that the Fellows from Honolulu responded most to, beyond the professional challenge, was the sense of Portland values. Portland is unique and has its own culture, social fabric and values that define it very uniquely. Honolulu can be defined similarly, but its sense of culture comes from centuries of international heritage. The conscientious decision of the government to protect and promote that heritage is discernible. They insist on making it accessible to everyone, but Hawaiian's first. That struck me as very 'Portland.'"

Q: What was their specific project, and what kind of advice did the group of fellows give to the Hawaiians?

"Honolulu has a government-owned-and-operated concert arena, exhibition space, and concert hall, named the Blaisdell Center. The Center is outdated, in need of costly repairs, and sits squarely in a

booming development district. The Center is used for large attractions such as the Broadway production of the Lion King and a concert hall for Bruno Mars, but it's also where local dog shows take place, high school graduations are held, and the local symphony plays. But more importantly, it is considered the regional gathering place on the island. It is where cultural gatherings are held and where Hawaiians celebrate themselves. The protection of culture and place was foremost in the Mayor's mind in his challenge for ULI.

Our advice to the Mayor, and to Honolulu, was to embrace their heritage and open up the area surrounding the Blaisdell Center as a "Cultural District" for Hawaiians and for tourists.

Within a five-minute walk from the Blaisdell Center, you see the Honolulu Museum of Art, which houses a world-class collection. That walk also encompasses the Honolulu Museum of Art School that draws international students that are not only millennials with new and different demands of public space, but intellectually invested in their sense of place. And it includes more than 400 new units of housing, primarily consisting of studios and one-bedrooms. Lastly, and how did I make this last??????, Honolulu is building a rail system that will have a station within a 5-minute walk of the Blaisdell Center. We Portlanders know what a new rail station means.

In a 10-minute walk from the Blaisdell Center, one can access the glorious beaches, the new hipster Kaka'ako District with distilleries, street art and Friday night "Sunday Parkways" for adults. It includes the government center that brings tour buses through on the hour, and a shopping district that ranges from mid- to high-end retail.

Our group recommended creating a 'yellow brick road' that went from the Blaisdell Center to the beach, activating the park and celebrating its rich cultural heritage, taking underused road lanes for bicycle and pedestrian improvements, consolidating uses of the Blaisdell Center for higher value, partnering with the museum and schools for a magnet arts program, tackling difficult parking issues; and considering different taxes/fees to generate much needed maintenance revenue. We also recommended the exploration of public-private partnerships to kick-start the most urgently needed investments."

Q: What, if any, similarities did you notice when comparing Portland to Honolulu? Are there any major differences that stick out?

"The two cities struck me as very similar in their being based in core values that were non-negotiable. These values inform how people interact with one another and define the social fabric of the cities. A remarkable difference for me was how car-centric Honolulu is. They have arterial streets running through the city with more lanes their highways have. But I applaud Mayor Caldwell and his vision of transforming Honolulu by bringing bike share to the city, installing bike lanes and building a rail system."

Q: What's Honolulu's transportation network like, when compared to Portland?

"Honolulu has a very robust bus system that is owned and operated by the local government. And it is named 'The Bus.' I LOVE that. I hope they name their new rail system 'The Rail.'"

Q: How does a trip like this inform or affect your decisions made on the job here in Portland, or how you approach your job here?

"I was very drawn to the Honolulu challenge when it was presented to the entire incoming group of ULI fellows last October because of its focus on culture and ensuring a connection between social and physical infrastructure. The challenge we were given and our proposed options took those things very seriously and I was fulfilled emotionally and intellectually by it. The fellows from Honolulu were gracious in providing us tours of their museums, historical sites and providing us personal access to their societal and political influences. But it came with a large amount of responsibility that matured me professionally and personally. In a very short amount of time we had to absorb, pay homage and pay forward a significant part of Honolulu's future. That responsibility sits deeply in my knowledge base and I feel a similar responsibility for Portland's future. Portland is on the cusp. We are facing many of the same issues Honolulu is – gentrification, changing demographics, and a strong desire to protect what makes us 'Portland' in the midst of it all. My experience in Honolulu has strengthened my toolkit for that."

Q: We hope you were able to get out a bit and soak up the sun, so Oregonians could live through you. Tell us that's the case. Yes?

"Yes! Oahu is a beautiful island filled with people who are giving and gracious. I learned the true meaning of shaka. My family experienced aloha. And we were embraced by locals wherever we went. Our last day on the island was thankfully a day full of sunshine and perfect 80+ degree weather. We found a local beach and packed our boogie boards, water wings and picnic lunch. When we were looking for a picnic table in the shade to eat, all of the tables were taken so we asked a group if we could join them. They made room for us and invited us to spend the day with them. They were a group of paddle boarders who met as often as possible to get out on the water with their dogs and boards and to soak up the sun and waves. They took us all out on their boards WITH their dogs, and played with all of us for hours. We shared stories, food, pictures and email addresses. This is aloha in its purest form – that welcoming and openness that the Hawaiians practice."

## **Jack Graham, Portland's fired top executive, says he made a 'judgment call' in budget scandal**

*By Brad Schmidt*

Making his first public statements since being fired by Mayor Charlie Hales, Portland's former top administrator, Jack D. Graham, said Friday that city officials and an outside investigator have made misleading and stigmatizing statements about his role in a 2012 budget scandal.

During an 80-minute hearing in Portland City Hall requested by Graham, the former chief administrator sat directly across a conference table from Hales to make the case that his good name has been smeared.

Graham didn't dispute that he proposed a budget transfer to tap reserve funds, including water and sewer money.

But he did challenge findings from the city's subsequent investigation of the proposed transfer. Graham said he made a "judgment call," wasn't warned by staff that it would violate any specific policy and always planned to take responsibility if his decision was challenged.

Graham's provided his version of events Friday during a procedural "name-clearing hearing" in front of Hales and Tracy Reeve, the city's top attorney. Neither Hales nor Reeve asked questions or commented on Graham's statements, although Hales did shake hands with Graham before and after the hearing.

In many ways, Graham's testimony mirrored what he told attorney Yael Livny, hired by the city in November 2012 to investigate whether Graham tried to inappropriately steer about \$200,000 in water and sewer funds during the 2012-13 budget process. After whistleblowers stepped forward, the transfer was not made.

Graham and his attorney, Dana Sullivan, blasted Livny's investigation and comments made by elected officials after the investigation become public. Here are some highlights:

What prompted the proposal: Graham said then-Mayor Sam Adams asked him to "find" \$7 million for the city's general fund that Graham later learned would be used to help Portland Public Schools bridge its budget gap. "My staff and I made substantial progress in meeting the goal of finding the additional \$7 million, but, as the two weeks came to a close, we were short of the goal by about \$200,000," Graham read from a prepared statement Friday.

What Graham proposed: Graham said he proposed spending operating reserves that included about \$200,000 contributed by the city's Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services and was unaware of any prohibition against it. Citing city policy, Graham argued Friday that the use of the reserve

money is “open and flexible” and he made a judgment call that the transfer would be the “most effective way” to meet Adams’ directive.

“Reasonable minds could differ about whether these funds taken out of the operating reserve had to be returned to non-General Fund bureaus,” Graham said.

What others told him: Graham conceded that two employees, Rich Goward and Andrew Scott, provided him with a general recommendation against using the operating reserves. But he said they never provided any specific information related to City Code, policies, rules or laws specific to Portland.

“I can tell you with certainty,” Graham said, that neither Goward nor Scott “advised me that it would be in any way improper.”

Livny’s investigation, however, concluded that “there is credible evidence that Mr. Graham was explicitly warned that the transfer of Water/BES funds was improper but that he consciously chose to ignore the warnings.”

How he responded: Graham said he told Goward and Scott to proceed with the transfer and if others disagreed, he would “take responsibility for the mistake and correct it.” According to the city’s investigation, however, Goward told the investigator that Graham said, “What are they going to do to me? If it comes up, I’ll say ‘oops.’”

“I had no intention of claiming ignorance or saying ‘oops,’” Graham said Friday, “as the city erroneously stated in the report the city released to the public.”

In the aftermath: In 2013, a year after the city’s investigation, officials acknowledged a similar budget problem from 2011 where money was actually transferred to purchase a city building. In response, the City Council spent \$350,000 from the city’s general fund to correct it. Graham, who had no role in the 2011 issue, was fired a week later.

“We will leave it to another day to address the reasons that Mr. Graham was treated so differently,” Graham’s attorney said.

After the hearing, when asked if Hales expected Graham to sue the city, he said, “We’ll find out.”

## **The Portland Tribune**

### **Portland water and sewer customers get new consumer advocate**

*By Steve Law*

The Citizens Utility Board has hired longtime campaign finance reformer Janice Thompson as its new consumer advocate for Portland water and sewer ratepayers.

CUB was enlisted by the Portland City Council to serve as an independent advocate for city ratepayers, in light of long running allegations of out-of-control spending by the Portland Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services, especially on projects unrelated to water, sewer and storm drainage services. CUB hopes to pay for its work by collecting donations from city residents.

Thompson formerly led Common Cause Oregon and Democracy Reform Oregon, (previously called the Money in Politics Research Action Project.) She left Common Cause to return to her home state of Minnesota to run the Midwest Democracy Network, but recently moved back to Oregon.

Jeff Bissonnette, organizing director for CUB, says the nonprofit is taking a “deep dive” into operations at the two bureaus.

“One thing we’re looking a lot at is the capital expenditures, because that’s where the big money is,” he says.

Critics of the two bureaus have complained about new ratepayer-funded office buildings for both bureaus, projects to cap reservoirs at Mount Tabor and Washington parks, a new water storage facility on Powell Butte and other projects.

One “common theme” CUB has found so far is that ratepayers don’t understand the rationale or reasoning for bureau actions, Bissonnette says. CUB will be ready to discuss some of its early findings early next month, he says.

Not coincidentally, that’s about the time when a campaign should be heating up for a May 20 ballot initiative that aims to shift control of the two city bureaus from city commissioners to an independent elected board, and create the Portland Public Water District.

## **Willamette Week**

### **With Quotas and Incentive Pay, The Oregonian is Again Reshaping Its Experience for Readers**

UPDATE: "This one is a doozy," writes David Carr.

*By Aaron Mesh*

Close readers of The Oregonian have borne witness to dramatic changes in the past several months.

In October, the newspaper became a “digital first” media company, with news stories posted first to its website, Oregonlive.com, then dropped into a print edition that was reduced to home delivery four days a week.

At the same time—coming after widespread newsroom layoffs—the journalism has often been less deeply reported, with more posts that rely on press releases, links to stories from other media outlets, or reader comments.

The East Coast owners of The Oregonian now say they want more.

Internal documents obtained by WW show that a quota system is being put in place that calls for steep increases in posting to Oregonlive.com, and promises compensation for those employees who post most often.

The new policy, shown to the editorial staff in a PowerPoint presentation in late February, provides that as much as 75 percent of reporters’ job performance will be based on measurable web-based metrics, including how often they post to Oregonlive.com.

Beat reporters will be expected to post at least three times a day, and all reporters are expected to increase their average number of posts by 40 percent over the next year.

In addition, reporters have been told to stir up online conversations among readers.

“On any post of substance, reporter will post the first comment,” the policy says. “Beat reporters [are to] solicit ideas and feedback through posts, polls and comments on a daily basis.”

The Oregonian will hand out yearly bonuses—if the finances of the company allows it—to reporters who exceed these goals. The policy says “final performance ratings will determine merit pay.”

Prior to this, merit increases were distributed among reporters in a far more subjective fashion, given by management to those who produced the year's best work, or distinguished themselves as leaders in the newsroom, according to longtime employees.

The PowerPoint (which WW has linked to here) also says that reporters are expected to produce "top-flight journalistic and digitally oriented enterprise" that have as their goals "page views and engagement." The policy says that the goal for this work is "two times each quarter."

This development is similar to planned changes in the newsroom of the New Orleans Times-Picayune, which is also owned by privately-held New York-based Advance Publications Inc.

It puts the media giant on a fast track that critics say shifts the culture of journalism toward that of a factory floor.

The news has not been universally welcomed in the newsroom, where Editor Peter Bhatia presented the PowerPoint entitled "Performance Management Process Overview for Employees," last month.

"'Bummed out' wouldn't begin to describe it," one reporter tells WW.

Outside observers say the policy will change what kind of news is delivered to readers.

"There will be more bits and bites of content," says Ken Doctor, a longtime analyst of the news industry and a one-time editor and publisher in Oregon. "But you'll see fewer of those stories that require talking to 5 or 10 people, as opposed to talking to 1 or 2 people."

The new policy will likely increase Oregonlive.com's use of daily, short posts that follow an original news post by reporting on readers' comments, creating polls to gauge reader reaction, and "aggregating" the site's most popular stories—as a way to build page views.

The policy says Advance is aiming to increase Oregonlive.com page views by 27.7 percent by the end of the year. (The paper's traffic is already sizable, with online metrics site Quantcast showing 23 million page views last month.)

"Advance, for better or for worse, has been the most aggressive American newspaper company in moving to the web," says Joshua Benton, director of the Nieman Journalism Lab. "This is their bet. It makes sense that they would want to align their staff with that bet."

Oregonian Media Group president and publisher N. Christian Anderson did not directly address the memo, but tells WW that web posting will be one of many factors in evaluating reporters.

"Incentive pay is not tied exclusively to any one goal," Anderson says, "but rather to the full range of journalistic achievement."

Bhatia did not respond to WW's request for comment.

Internal communications among Oregonian editors show they are still discussing how to apply the new standards to their departments.

In a recent email to other Oregonian managers, director of local content Susan Gage pointed to standards set by at another Advance newspaper, the New Orleans Times Picayune, and its web site, NOLA.com.

The NOLA.com standards set "journalistic excellence" as valued as 20 percent of a reporter's performance—the same amount as "continuous publishing," a term that refers to meeting the quota of three posts per day.

In the March 11 email, obtained by WW, Gage told the other managers the NOLA.com standards could become a model at The Oregonian.

The changes come as The Oregonian is shaking up its top management. Bhatia announced March 6 he is leaving later this year, after 20 years at the paper.

(Bhatia took a one-year teaching job at Arizona State University's Cronkite School of Journalism.)

Doctor says Advance's digital strategy is a "shock treatment" that may force reporters to produce better stories faster.

But he says the company has had trouble implementing its plan.

"From the abrupt change from print to digital," Doctor says, "to how they talked to readers about that change, to now how they've been talking to their own staffs about it, it's been a remarkably clumsy process."

UPDATE, 11 am Monday: The New York Times' media business reporter David Carr examines The Oregonian's new policy in his Monday column.

"In the more-with-less annals of corporate mandates, this one is a doozy," Carr writes.

He compares the Advance directives to the policies of several web-based media companies, including Gawker, where financially rewarding reporters for drawing traffic is common practice.

"And journalism's status as a profession is up for grabs," Carr writes. "A viral hit is no longer defined by the credentials of an individual or organization. The media ecosystem is increasingly a pro-am affair, where the wisdom — or prurient interest — of the crowd decides what is important and worthy of sharing."